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ABSTRACT

The changing workplace has altered workers' roles and forced them to assume primary responsibility for their own career development. Continued employment is increasingly being tied to lifelong learning and ongoing skill development. Just as workers are recognizing the need to ensure their marketability to employers, so too are employers facing increased pressure to make their organizations attractive to workers. Today's workers must be entrepreneurial. They must function as free agents, marketing themselves and the skills they can offer to the employers who serve as their "customers." Career development, although continuing to focus on career awareness, exploration, and development, must be updated to include strategies for employment in the 21st century. Career awareness must be transformed from a preemployment activity to a process that remains ongoing throughout employment. Career awareness efforts must highlight the new role of workers as free agents who are responsible for developing and marketing their skills. Career exploration practices must highlight career management skills. The Internet offers another tool for career planning. It is useful for "educating yourself on job searches and career transitions, researching prospective employers, tracking trends, making contacts with other people, and identifying and generating professional opportunities" (Koonce 1997). Career development practices must reflect the employment trends and practices of the workplace and support individuals in their efforts to develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that will enable them to be successful. (Contains 17 references) (MN)

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Career Development: A Shared Responsibility

With the workplace in a seemingly constant state of transition, independence and self-sufficiency have been promoted as the stabilizing factor in the quest for employment security. Concepts of career resilience, self-reliance, free agency, and flexible work arrangements all focus on the theme of assuming responsibility for one's work life. This perspective moves "control" of employment into the negotiating hands of both employers and employees.

One of the biggest challenges today's employers face is creating an organization that attracts and keeps talented people (Pink 1997). In greatest demand are qualified workers who will *share* responsibility for achieving the company's goals and objectives—workers who will work with the enthusiasm and dedication of shareholders in the company enterprise. In this environment, the focus is on challenge, reward, and satisfaction. This *Digest* examines ways in which the changing workplace has altered the roles of workers. It also discusses ways in which career development efforts can be updated to prepare individuals for work in this new environment.

A Balance of Power

Eliminating "co-dependent" behavior has become as important for employment health as it is for psychological well-being. Today's workers are realizing that the only source of employment security is the security they create for themselves, by becoming self-reliant and career resilient (Brown 1996). Continued employment is tied to lifelong learning and ongoing skill development, practices that enhance career growth and the potential for career advancement and mobility. This trend toward career independence is reflected in the new breed of independent contractors and temporary workers who move from job to job and project to project, marketing themselves for temporary assignments in a variety of organizations rather than seeking permanent jobs. When the self-employed are counted, these "free agents" comprise more than 16% of the U.S. population, roughly 25 million people who are continually marketing their skills, abilities, and achievements to realize their employment goals (Pink 1997).

Workers are recognizing the need to ensure their marketability to employers, and employers are facing increased pressure to make their organizations attractive to workers. In the current tight labor market, where workers remember job loss as an outcome of corporate restructuring and downsizing, company loyalty has gone by the wayside. Brown (1998a) reports that even newly hired workers are on the lookout for a "better" opportunity, with 50-60% of them changing jobs within the first 7 months of employment. To offset excessive turnover, many companies are offering advantages associated with free agency (Reich 1998): "flexibility in how, when, and where you work; compensation linked to what you contribute; freedom to move from project to project."

This shared responsibility for employment has resulted in the evolution of various partnership arrangements. Formal employment contracts, which are designed to satisfy the needs of both employers and employees, are being developed through collective bargaining and contain employment stipulations that are agreeable to both parties (Brown 1997). Through such contracts, "employers provide the opportunities, tools, and support to help employees develop their skills and maintain their employability; the employees have the responsibility of managing their careers by taking advantage of the opportunities they are given" (ibid., p. 1).

What are the implications of this shared responsibility? Today's workers must be entrepreneurial. They must function as free agents, marketing themselves and the skills they can offer to employers who serve as "customers."

How Can Career Development Programs Be Updated?

Career development programs, although continuing to focus on career awareness, exploration, and development, must be updated to contain strategies for employment in the 21st century.

Make Career Awareness an Ongoing Process

Career awareness is not a preemployment activity, but rather one that must be ongoing throughout employment. "In a knowledge-based economy, the new coin of the realm is learning" (Reich 1998). Workers must continually search for new ways to learn skills that will facilitate their continued employability, e.g., "versatility, flexibility, creativity, self-direction, interpersonal and communication skills, facility with computer and information technology, ability to learn continuously, and ability to manage work, time, and money" (Kerka 1997, p. 1).

Career awareness efforts must highlight the new role of workers as free agents, responsible for the development, application, and marketing of their skills. As employees, these workers must be "willing to change; provide a shared vision—which is inspirational; be willing to facilitate others to act; win respect of fellow workers and from their places of employment; and project a commitment and attitude of enthusiasm that will cause organizations to retain them" (Mosca 1997, p. 57).

The trend toward spirituality in the workplace is indicative of the need for individuals to find work that has meaning and value to them and that affords them an opportunity to satisfy their needs for contribution and community (Imel 1998). As Reich (1998) notes, companies are learning that money alone will not enable them to attract, keep, and make teams out of talented people. "Talented people want to be part of something that they can believe in, something that confers meaning on their work and on their lives." Career awareness programs must alert individuals to the importance of self-fulfillment and to strategies for assessing whether or not an organization espouses the "kind of mission that offers people a chance to do work that makes a difference" (ibid). As noted by Mosca (1997), "an individual's true wealth will be centered and manifest itself as an inner self-trust, an awareness of self-belief," and a feeling of fulfillment (p. 57).

Highlight Career Management Skills in Career Exploration

New career exploration practices that include school-to-work initiatives such as internships, apprenticeships, and work site experiences are valuable ways for students to learn about work in a specific occupational area. Those who are already working can expand their experiences through various types of continuing education and work force education programs.

Because the workplace of the 21st century will be "characterized by many complex, tactical, and strategic tasks that require the assimilation of increasing amounts of new knowledge; personal thinking, application, and problem-solving abilities; and high work loads with extremely variable content . . . , senior management must acknowledge work force education as the driving activity that supports quality management and the work-team empowerment process" (Gordon 1997, p. 15). Mosca (1997) notes that employees need training "to infuse creativity into their jobs, be able to tolerate ambiguity, and accept responsibility and accountability for their work" (p. 53).

Whether developed through work force or school-based career development programs, the tools for success in today's highly competitive workplace include self-awareness, assertiveness, conflict resolution, interpersonal communications, and managing relationships (Cunanan and Maddy-Bernstein 1997). Personality clashes between employees, often triggered by power issues, are continuing to escalate in the workplace (Brown 1998b). ***USA Today*** reports that bullying and browbeating behaviors are becoming a significant workplace problem, undermining productivity and morale (Armour 1998). Career exploration activities should highlight strategies for managing relationships, including those that build self-esteem and promote an openness to different ways of thinking and acting (Brown 1998b).

Connect Individuals to Technology through Career Planning

The globalization of work, new technologies, and increasing numbers of jobs in the service sector are expanding the boundaries of where work is performed. Flavin (1997) reports that many workers are operating out of their homes and from mobile offices and hotel rooms. However, the ability to function independently from these locations requires workers to be self-motivated and have outstanding problem-solving, abstract reasoning, and planning skills, along with an attitude of persistence (Gordon 1997).

Career planning should involve all stakeholders in the worker's career and engage those who can model new ways of functioning. For example, mentoring is one strategy that can help new workers learn about an organization and its culture (Kerka 1998). It is also an effective way to help workers upgrade their skills. Through a mentoring program at OnSite Technologies, for example, less-experienced employees are paired with senior technical engineers to learn about new technologies (Kaufmann 1998).

The Internet offers another tool for career planning. It is useful for "educating yourself on job searches and career transitions, researching prospective employers, tracking trends, making contacts with other people, and identifying and generating professional opportunities" (Koonce 1997, p. 15). By scanning the top stories in such newspapers as the ***New York Times*** <http://www.nytimes.com> and ***USA Today*** <http://www.usatoday.com>, readers can learn about the trends and forces affecting workers. Other publications such as ***National Business Employment Weekly*** (http://www.nbew.com) offer information on job hunting and career planning (ibid.). The Web has opened the door to vast information resources for career planning.

Conclusion

Career development practices must reflect the employment trends and practices of the workplace and support individuals in their efforts to develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that will enable them to be successful. In the school setting, collaboration, articulation, and communication between partnerships of parents, businesses, community organizations, teachers, and other school personnel are key support elements (Cunanan and Maddy-Bernstein 1997). In the workplace, companies can help their employees toward career growth by communicating opportunities that are available to them, mapping a course of action, facilitating employee training and education, offering an opportunity for employees to try out their new skills, and providing feedback and assessment to guide ongoing career planning (Kaufmann 1998).

From the individual perspective, understanding the factors that shape and influence career choices "helps you see where you fit in the larger scheme of things . . . and helps you develop a better sense of direction and control in planning your life's work and future" (Farren 1998, p. 46). Workers can master the new skills and competencies of career development in partnership with employers, career educators, and counselors.

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